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ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS

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April 27, 2018

The Honorable Pete Sessions, Chairman
U.S. House Committee on Rules
H-312, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Sessions,

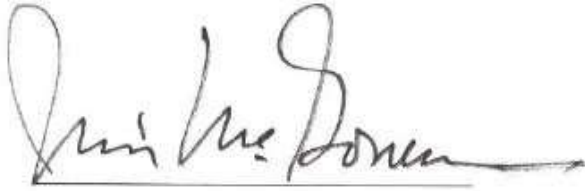
We were extremely troubled to learn today that Agriculture Committee Chairman Mike Conaway “expects a debate rule that would allow only lawmakers who plan to vote for the [Farm Bill] to offer amendments,” according to Politico’s Morning Agriculture report.

To completely shut out any member who won’t promise to vote with Republican leadership would be an extraordinary break with tradition by the Rules Committee, which historically has encouraged all members to bring their best ideas for consideration. Democrats may not even want to submit amendments to the Farm Bill because of the rigged, partisan process that has already taken place – which Chairman Conaway has brought further into the daylight with this outrageous plan – but it goes much deeper than Democratic amendments to one bill. Institutional matters such as this one affect both parties, and a policy to silence all voices of dissent will shut out Democrats and Republicans, and the millions of American citizens that they represent.

During this Congress we have witnessed the continued erosion of our great democracy, and watched our government inch further and further towards authoritarianism. Requiring members of Congress to take a Trump-style loyalty pledge just to get a chance to offer their amendments is, in a word, shocking. Perhaps this Republican majority has become so used to blocking all amendments that they’ve forgotten the simple fact that with a more open process, members may not know how they will vote on final passage until amendment consideration concludes on the House floor.

We fear statements such as Chairman Conaway’s damage the Rules Committee and our institution far beyond the Farm Bill, and have a chilling effect on the People’s House. Please provide a written response making crystal clear that it is not the policy of the Rules Committee to administer a litmus test of loyalty before members can be allowed even to pose their ideas to the House. This is still a democracy. Congress needs to act like it.

Sincerely,



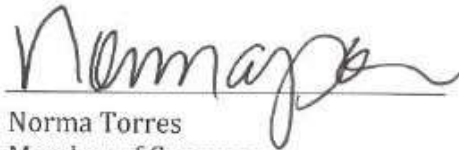
James P. McGovern
Ranking Member



Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress



Jared Polis
Member of Congress



Norma Torres
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Paul Ryan, Speaker
 The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Minority Leader
 The Honorable Mike Conaway, Chairman, Committee on Agriculture
 The Honorable Collin Peterson, Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture